



# ***Iowa Outdoors***

**Iowa Department of Natural Resources**  
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**Sept. 26, 2006**

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[A copy of the master plan, a vicinity/lake map and graphic of the lodge are available electronically upon request]

## **OFFICIAL CEREMONY TO LAUNCH NEW RESORT STATE PARK**

MORAVIA – Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack will be on hand for a groundbreaking ceremony to mark the beginning of Phase I construction at Honey Creek Resort State Park, near Moravia, at 9:30 a.m., Oct. 3.

Arnie Sohn, Honey Creek Resort State Park project manager with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) said the first phase includes a 105 room lodge with an indoor water park, meeting facilities and a restaurant, 28 cabins of various sizes, an 18 hole golf course, boat ramps and slips, and an RV park.

Work is planned this fall on the golf course, utilities and access roads. The Iowa DNR will have an erosion control plan in place and will monitor runoff before, during and after construction. With Lake Rathbun as the focal point, Sohn said the goal is to keep all runoff out of the lake.

“There are a lot of partners who are deeply invested and working to make this project successful,” said Sohn. “With a project of this size and scope in southern Iowa, it

holds the promise for economic enhancement for the surrounding area.”

The park site is 5.5 miles west of Moravia, and is located on 850 acres near the existing Honey Creek State Park. Phase 2 of the project, would include connecting the two parks with multipurpose trails and a pedestrian bridge over the Honey Creek arm of Lake Rathbun.

The principle financing source for the project is \$28 million in bond proceeds that will be paid off over a 30-year period with revenues generated by the resort. Rathbun Regional Water, Chariton Valley Electrical Cooperative and Iowa Telecom will contribute more than \$2 million in utility systems. Appanoose and Monroe counties, Rathbun Lake Resort, Inc. and private contributors have provided more than \$2 million in cash advances to be repaid from hotel/motel tax receipts.

An extensive private fundraising campaign to raise at least \$2 million will begin soon. These funds will be used to provide a variety of recreational facilities in the park.

The engineering, design and construction management will be handled by TSP Engineering. Regency Hotel Management will be running the resort.

Officials with the Iowa DNR, Army Corps of Engineers, local governments, elected officials, developers, architects, and other partners will be on hand for the ceremony.

**For more information, contact Sohn at 515-281-5814.**

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[electronic photo available]

## **STATEWIDE GOOSE SEASON BEGINS SATURDAY GOOD HABITAT CONDITIONS AND STRONG MIGRATION PREDICTED**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

DES MOINES – The second segment of this year's statewide goose season begins Saturday, Sep. 30. According to DNR waterfowl biologist, Guy Zenner, hunters can anticipate a long season, will encounter very good numbers of giant Canada geese, a better than average fall flight of arctic nesting Canada geese [including Richardson's Canadas] and above average numbers of lesser snow geese.

"This year's goose migration is already underway and things are looking very favorable for Iowa hunters," said Zenner. "During the past several days we've received a very nice influx of birds into the state as fast moving cold fronts pushed geese southward.

On Wednesday [Sep. 20] wildlife biologists began receiving reports of Richardson's Canada geese [commonly referred to as Hutchinson's geese] arriving in northern Iowa. Richardson's Canadas nest in the arctic, so we know those birds were migrants. On Sunday [Sep. 24] another strong migration of larger Canada geese also arrived from the north."

This year's habitat conditions should prove very favorable for attracting and holding geese, says Zenner. The same persistent lack of rainfall, low wetland water levels, and expanses of mud flats that have plagued ducks and duck hunters this fall, will actually be of benefit to migrating geese.

"Geese love to loaf on shallow water and open mud flat areas. If current conditions persist, these habitats will become goose magnets as new birds continue to arrive in Iowa," said Zenner.

"This year's corn and soybean harvest is just beginning and it doesn't look like many fields will be out by Saturday's opener. Hunters will need to keep on top of the crop harvest and then capitalize on those early fields," said Zenner. "Migrating geese are hungry and looking. Once a field is picked, it doesn't take long to find the food."

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## **VIKING LAKE RENOVATION CONTINUES ON SCHEDULE**

LEWIS – The fish kill in and below Viking Lake was caused by water with low oxygen levels as the water was released from the lake during the lake renovation. A majority of the fish killed were yellow bass that had come from the lake.

A stunted population of yellow bass had taken over Viking Lake recently, which led the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to plan the fish population renovation. The Iowa DNR will continue with its \$330,000 lake renovation plans, which include fixing a leak in the lake outlet gate, improving fishing jetties, constructing fish habitat, and deepening and placing riprap along the shoreline.

Viking Lake is currently empty, except for a few small pockets of water. Any remaining areas with water will be treated with rotenone, a chemical that is toxic to fish, to eliminate any remaining fish.

The lake will be restocked in March with larger sized fingerlings of largemouth bass, bluegills and channel catfish. In the spring of 2008, adult sized crappies will be added to the lake.

**For more information, contact Andy Moore at 712-769-2587.**

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## **ENJOY IOWA'S FALL BEAUTY**

Fall is often the best time in Iowa to enjoy the outdoors. The warm days and cool nights, low humidity (no bugs) and the brilliant autumn colors make this the perfect time to hike, camp, picnic or ride outdoors. Every year thousands of Iowans and visitors alike flock to the countryside to view nature's colorful display of red, orange, yellow and purple leaves. While most people appreciate this cornucopia of fall color; very few understand why and how trees change color.

A common misconception about leaf change is that the leaves are dying. The development of fall colors is an active process and trees must be alive to undergo the change in color and drop their leaves. Trees which are killed during the growing season do not undergo the leaf change, their leaves simply dry up.

Tree leaves actually have color all summer long, but the green chlorophyll, which is used to convert sunlight into sugar and starches for tree growth, masks the true yellow, orange, red and purple pigments in the leaves. In the fall, because of shorter days and cooler temperatures, the leaves stop their food-making process. The chlorophyll breaks down, the green color disappears, and the yellow, orange and red colors become visible.

A very common question this time of year is "When is the best fall color?" Weather throughout the fall season has much to do with the development of color in our trees. Cool night temperatures destroy chlorophyll quickly, but below freezing temperatures inhibit production of red pigments. The brightest displays of color occur when we have an early fall of bright sunny days and cool nights. These are excellent conditions for the development of red pigments.

Cloudy days and warm nights will produce less brilliant colors because chlorophyll breaks down slowly and the red pigments are not formed quickly enough. Dry weather causes a greater buildup of sugars in the leaves, enhancing the production of the red pigments. Windy, rainy weather causes many leaves to fall prematurely, lessening the intensity of the display. A killing frost will destroy the leaf cells and the coloration process will not function effectively.

Usually the color change goes from north to south across the state beginning in the end of September in the far north to the end of October in the southern most counties. The Yellow River State Forest is in the far northeast part of the state; the Stephens State Forest is centrally located near Chariton; the Shimek State Forest is in extreme southeast Iowa, while the Loess Hills State Forest is between Sioux City and Council Bluffs.

If you are planning a trip to view the autumn foliage, the DNR Bureau of Forestry has a Fall Color Hotline in place. Call 515-233-4110 for a pre-recorded message, updated weekly about where and when the foliage is color in being seen.

**For more information contact Linda DePaul at 515-281-5441 or email at [linda.depaul@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:linda.depaul@dnr.state.ia.us).**

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[electronic photos available]

## **SEARCH FOR ENDANGERED MUSSELS**

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

From the water and muck, a wood and wire mesh cage emerged. Hoisted on board the workboat, the mud in the bottom was hosed overboard. As the debris washed away, dime-sized shells—dozens of them, a hundred or more--appeared. Biologists tallied 870 first-year Higginseye pearly mussels in eight special cages, pulled from the floor of the Dubuque Ice Harbor. For a moment, it seemed hard to believe that the higginseye is an endangered species. This special harvest, though, was the result of hard work and a lot of luck, as biologists learn how to grow mussels in stable surroundings, for eventual release to the wild.

Their fear is that it might be ‘too little, too late’ to save this integral member of the river community; a species that doesn’t get much attention; perhaps because it is hidden on the river bottom for its lifetime. From downtown Coralville to rural Jones County...and along the Upper Mississippi River and tributaries...they’re trying to stop the population freefall of mussels.

In this experiment, crews anchored the cages at the back end of the harbor. “We use floats to keep the cages off the bottom”, explains U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service biologist Tony Davis. In his wetsuit, he poked around underwater to detach the cages and pull them to the work area. “One of the problems is siltation into the cages. (This way) we keep them out of the sedimentation that has wiped out some years’ production.” Even still, silt coated the cage bottoms; with the little mussels sprinkled throughout. They had dropped from the gills of largemouth bass, which had been specially inoculated with the larval glochidia before being placed in the cages, a few months prior.

The outcome was a little more realistic on inland streams surveyed late this summer. Stream teams floated and pawed their way through the shallows, looking for older mussels, planted in previous years. With hundreds of staff hours invested, fewer than a dozen higginseyes were confirmed. A few more candidates await DNA determination. One of the ‘possibles’ came from the Iowa River, at Coralville. The rest

came from the Wapsipinicon River, where the first confirmed higinseye in 80 years was located in 2005.

“We have definitely found a few, which is fantastic,” proclaims Scott Gritters, a fisheries biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. “We have inoculated some into the gills of fish and turned the fish loose (in the rivers). We have proven that we can restore mussels. We have no idea, though, if the mussels will reproduce.” Reproduction will be the next step in this labor intensive, cross-your-fingers quest to restore not only the higinseye, but other species of mussels in trouble as well.

Lately, the ‘endangered’ label is almost a given. If it is—or was—a mussel, chances are it is endangered...or gone now from Iowa waters. Studies in the 1990s showed that a dozen of the 50 or more known mussel species are gone; extirpated from Iowa waters. Another 15 are on the endangered or threatened species lists. The rest are not far behind. “In the late 1980s, there was a die off of mussels in the Mississippi River. We never fully understood why,” offers Gritters. It might have been disease. The explosion of zebra mussels harmed native species, too. Overharvesting mussels played a role, too; a couple times in the last century. Now, though, commercial clamming is illegal in interior waters, and on the Mississippi River, where it borders Iowa and Wisconsin. One bright spot has emerged, with some monitoring sites showing slight upturns in the last few years.

No matter what the contributing factors, experts agree water quality is most critical. Gritters, and others, say reducing soil runoff is a logical first step. But that is easier said than done; with thousands of landowners and reams of government policy in the mix.

So they continue their experimentation into ways to prop up the sagging numbers; not just for higinseyes, but ‘yellow sandshells’, ‘fat muckets’ and other species. Seed stock of mature mussels are guarded closely in federal hatcheries. Biologists are actually using 21<sup>st</sup> Century technology on early 20<sup>th</sup> Century methods, used when the Mississippi River button industry started to collapse. “This is an attempt to culture them”, explains Gritters. “If the numbers keep plunging in the wild, this could keep them from going off the face of the planet.”

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## **IOWA PARKS WELCOME VOLUNTEERS ON PUBLIC LANDS DAY**

DES MOINES — Every year, Iowa state parks treat visitors to beautiful scenery and cherished outdoors recreation. This month, Iowans can give back to their beloved parks during a national day of volunteer action.

This Saturday, Sept. 30, volunteers across the country will help to beautify and preserve state and federal lands during the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual National Public Lands Day. The Iowa DNR's Keepers of the Land volunteer program invites Iowans to take part by volunteering at an Iowa state park.

Interested parties should contact their favorite Iowa state park and ask about potential volunteer activities. Current projects in many Iowa state parks would benefit from additional volunteers.

Possible activities include building or clearing trail, removing invasive species, picking up litter, helping with maintenance and construction and many other fun and rewarding tasks. Visit [www.iowadnr.com/parks/state\\_park\\_list/](http://www.iowadnr.com/parks/state_park_list/) for a list of Iowa state parks and contact information.

National Public Lands Day occurs annually, bringing thousands of volunteers to the nation's public lands. Last year, 90,000 Americans volunteered across the country. Iowans who choose to participate will help to improve and protect the beauty and health of their state's public lands. Visit [www.publiclandsday.org](http://www.publiclandsday.org) for more information about the national event.

Partner organizations with the Keepers of the Land also have many other volunteer opportunities planned for the coming month. Visit [www.keepersoftheland.org](http://www.keepersoftheland.org) for more information, including an on-line events calendar. Other upcoming activities include:

- The residential tree program, Plant Some Shade, Saturday, Sept. 30, in Des Moines. Contact Matt Brewer at (515) 242-6892 or at [matt.brewer@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:matt.brewer@dnr.state.ia.us) for more information or visit our website.
- The residential tree program, Operation ReLeaf, Saturday, Oct. 7, in Guthrie Center. Contact Amy Oliver at (515) 281-6749 or at [amy.oliver@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:amy.oliver@dnr.state.ia.us) or visit our website.

For more information, contact Merry Rankin at (515) 281-0878 or at [Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us](mailto:Merry.Rankin@dnr.state.ia.us).

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## **FISHING REGULATIONS RELAXED AT DICKINSON COUNTY LAKE**

SPIRIT LAKE – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will remove most fishing regulations on Diamond Lake in Dickinson County beginning Oct. 1 to allow anglers to harvest fish before the fish population is renovated. Fish may be harvested by any means, except with explosive devices, electricity or any fish stupifying substances.

The daily and possession limits have been removed. These relaxed regulations will be in effect until April 1, 2007.

“Our plan for Diamond Lake is to draw the lake water level down, renovate the fish population to eliminate the carp, and to allow the aquatic vegetation to get re-established which will improve water quality, fishing and be attractive to waterfowl,” said Jim Christianson, fisheries biologist with the DNR.

The DNR is already in the process of drawing the 166-acre lake down. The process will last into 2007.

**For more information, contact Christianson at 712-336-1840.**

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[electronic photo available]

## **IOWA HAWK BANDER MAKES INCREDIBLE DISCOVERY**

By Lowell Washburn

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

**MARQUETTE---**Iowa bird bander, John Stravers has been capturing and tagging wild hawks for more than thirty years. As is the case with most long time banders, he can relate some pretty exciting tales of close encounters, near misses, and rare captures. But none of his stories are likely to surpass the amazing account of a southbound hawk netted near Marquette.

The event occurred during October, 2004. While trapping at the Effigy Mounds Hawk Banding Station, Stravers managed to capture an adult female Cooper's hawk. Adult Cooper's are always impressive, but this specimen was exceptional.

"This hawk was just magnificent," recalls Stravers. "Nothing but hard muscle and feathers -- just a hunk. She was incredible."

Even more incredible was the fact that the newly captured hawk was already banded, a rare event among wild bird populations --- and especially so among raptors. Before releasing his prize, Stravers duly recorded and reported the band number to officials with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Banding Laboratory. It is at this point that the story really begins to get interesting.

"I turned in the number and found out that the hawk had been banded at Vera Cruz, Mexico by someone named Ernesto Ruelas," says Stravers. "I was shocked. Wait a minute, I said, I know this guy -- we worked together."

Stravers and Ruelas first met in Nevada in 1989. Stravers was studying birds of



prey in the American West. Ruelas was studying hawk migration in Mexico. Suspecting he had discovered a major migration corridor, Ruelas had traveled to the U.S. to learn accurate survey methods. Although he wasn't quite sure how to accurately count the hawks using the Mexican route, he had made his best attempt at estimating their numbers.

"When Ernesto and I first met, my Spanish and his English were not so good," said Stravers. "The barriers were challenging at times, but we were both so enthused about the hawks that we managed to communicate. We ended up becoming great friends."

"No one really believed the counts could be that high, but it was enough to make everyone curious about what was going on down there," said Stravers. "A team from Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania ended up going to Mexico. It did turn out that his numbers were off, but it was only because he had actually underestimated [instead of overestimating] the number of hawks down there. The U.S. team ended up counting 80,000 migrating hawks in one day, and estimated that up to 2 million use the flyway during an entire season. One of the things Ernesto wanted was to set up a banding station, and he got one."

The Vera Cruz banding station would become the exact location where, in mid-October of 2000, Ruelas would capture and band the Cooper's hawk that, four years and four round trip migrations later, would be recaptured in northeastern Iowa by his old friend, John Stravers.

"When people hear this story they just shake their heads," says Stravers. "When you think about it, it really is incredible. To recapture any banded hawk is extremely rare, but to have one go four years, to have the banding and recapture locations so widely separated, and then to have the guys on both ends of the chain actually know each other; I'd have say it goes beyond incredible."

A new fall migration has begun. Right on schedule, thousands of southbound raptors are currently streaming through Iowa. As the flight continues to gain momentum, hawk watchers from one end of the flyway to the other will marvel at the annual passage. One of those enthusiasts might even have the good fortune to catch that tiny, tell-tale glint of silver that signifies a marked bird.

Who knows? That sparkle could even come from the leg of a big adult Cooper's who, like Stravers and Ruelas, has a few good stories of her own.

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